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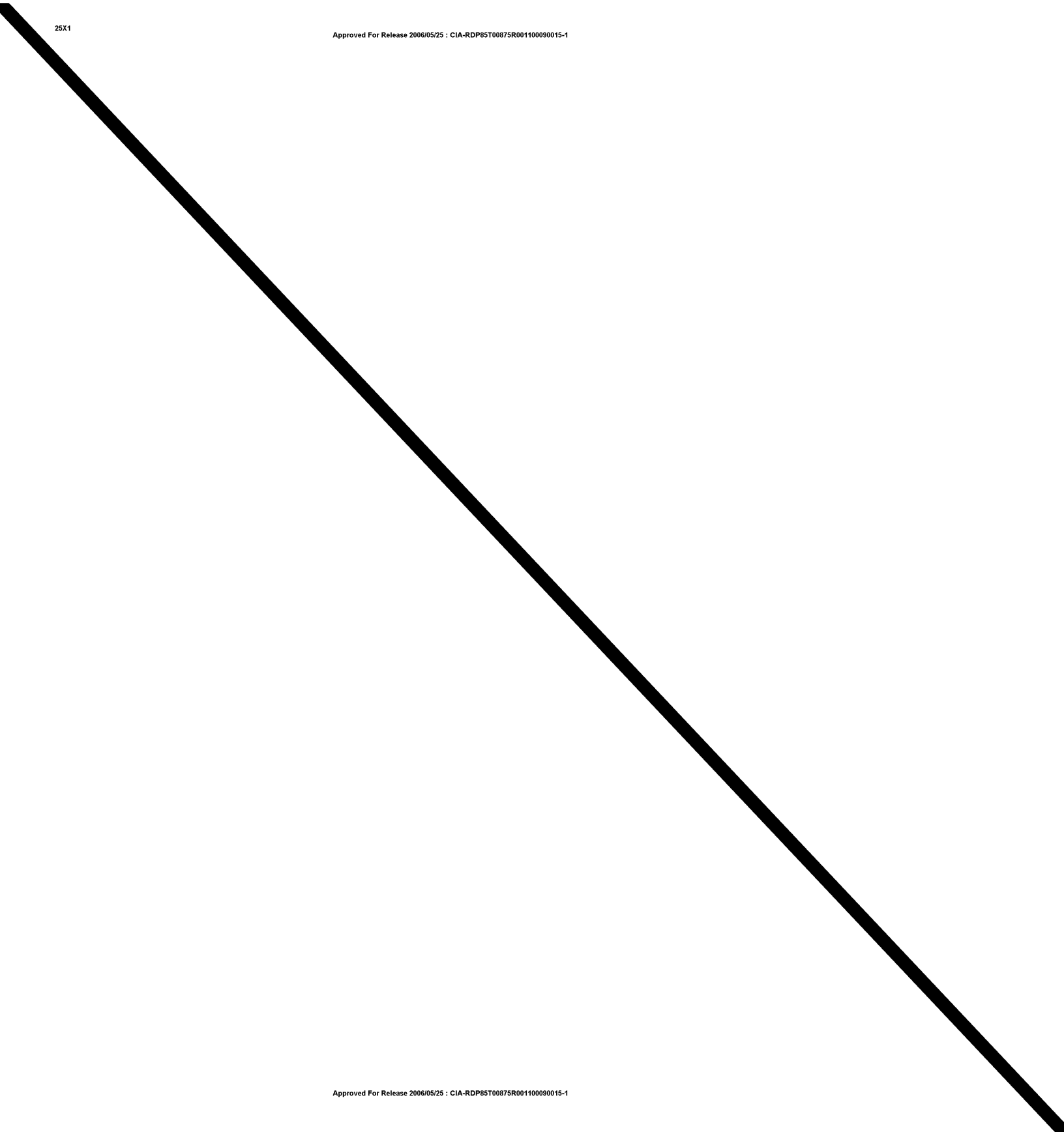

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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

Philippine Student Agitation

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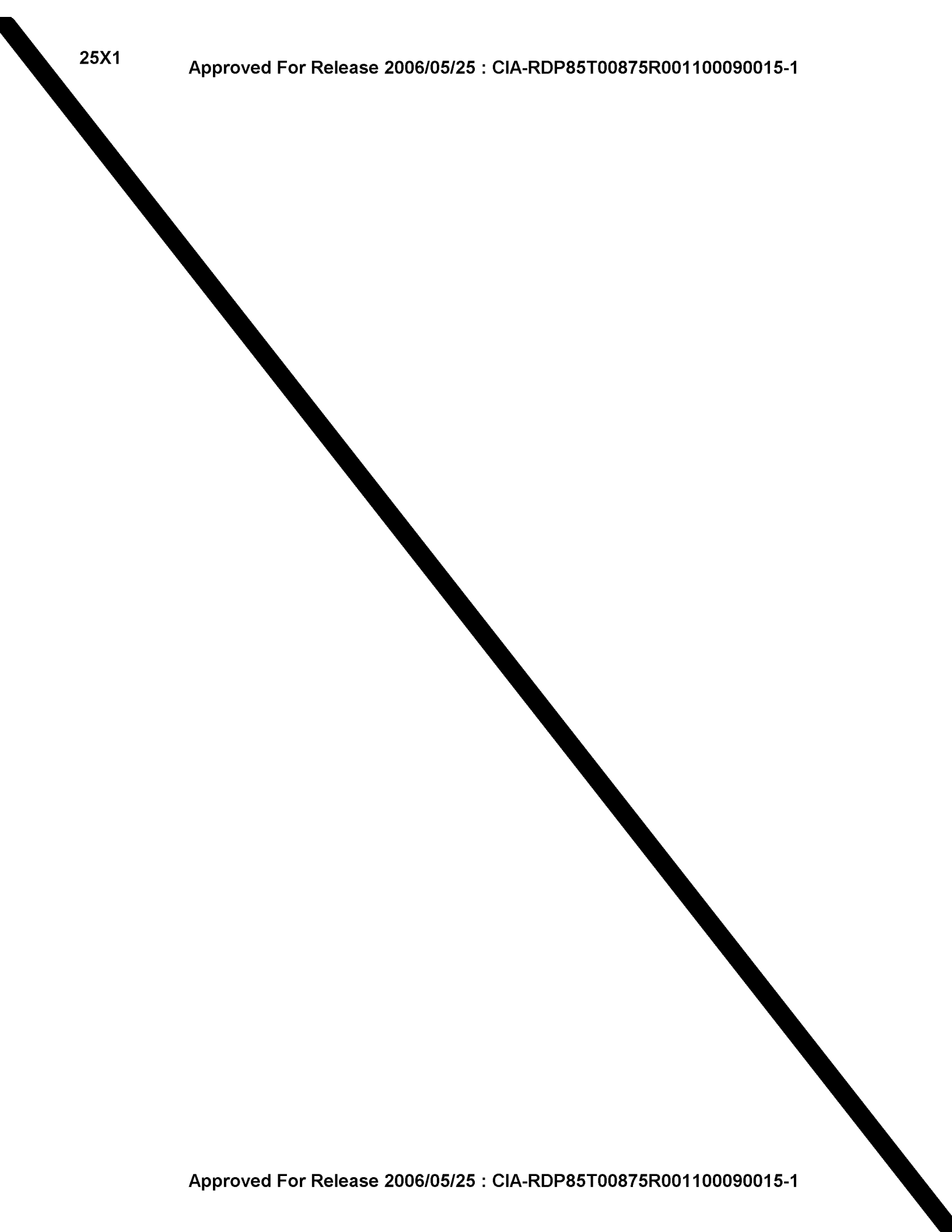

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
3 April 1970

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Philippine Student Agitation

The surprising student challenge to Philippine President Marcos early this year marked a sharp departure from the students' previous acceptance of what they recognized as the inequities of the Philippine political-economic system. Although the protesting students are not yet well organized, their demonstrations and demands represent the first significant challenge to traditional Philippine society since the Huk insurrection of the early 1950s.

This paper briefly examines the background and current status of Philippine student activism and its effects on the administration, and particularly on President Marcos. The several student groups are identified and discussed. Finally, the prospects for the students' pushing the government and the ruling elite into undertaking badly needed social and political reforms are considered.

Note: This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated with the Office of National Estimates.

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Evolution of Student Activism

1. The vast majority of Philippine students have traditionally concerned themselves merely with finding their niche in the system. Their tractability was the product of a complex society that emphasized respect for elders and that was based on a tightly interwoven and extended family system that looked first to the needs of its members. This self-containment usually was at the expense of national and other interests.

2. The growth and impact of student activism throughout the world in recent years, however, has prompted Filipino students to begin to question conditions at home. Student activism is greatest in Manila, where 33 colleges and universities account for about half of the 600,000 enrolled in higher educational institutions in the Philippines. In 1969, persistent agitation against paternalistic college and university administrations by students forced some attention to their wishes from school administrators. Several successful confrontations with Marcos over government funds for state-supported schools, which had been promised periodically and then withheld, encouraged students in their new assertiveness. Also long-festering resentment over the dim prospects for remunerative employment under a system in which advancement has been determined more by family ties than by ability has come to a head and has expanded into contempt for what was seen as the venalities of the system.

3. Student organizations in the Philippines have traditionally been, and still remain, very unstable. Organizations have sprung up only to be shattered as leadership feuds caused breakaway factions to go their own ways and add to the plethora of groups competing for the students' allegiance.

4. The moderate National Union of Students Philippines (NUSP) claims now to represent about half of the country's college and university students, but it is loosely structured and has had little sense of direction. It is affiliated with the smaller and also moderate National Students

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League, which draws its membership from state-operated institutions. The NUSP has been consistently outflanked by the militant though much smaller student left. As a result, the NUSP felt compelled to become more militant and aggressive itself.

5. The student left is dominated by the Kabataang Makabayan (KM - Nationalist Youth). The KM, founded in 1964, is extremist, militant, professedly pro-Maoist, and disposed to violence. The focal point of its activities is the University of the Philippines, although it has also set up chapters at other universities in Manila and the provinces. It claims a membership of 12,000, but its actual strength is probably less than 5,000, with only about 500 committed members in the Manila area. The organization's real strength lies in the abilities of its hard core to agitate and manipulate. Although the KM lacks the numbers for impressive mass action of its own, it has often succeeded in infiltrating and directing toward more violent ends the rallies and demonstrations of moderate youth and student groups. It is afflicted by the squabbling and infighting that characterize the Philippine left, however, and it lacks leadership in depth. Even though it currently dominates student agitation, no individual within the KM appears to have the potential of developing a national student following.

6. The Samahang Demokratikong Kabataang (SDK - Union of Democratic Youth) was formed in 1968 by KM leaders who had become dissatisfied with the leadership of the group's founder--subsequently eased out--and with the KM's increasingly strident advocacy of violence. This small splinter group probably basically agrees with the KM's leftist, anti-US stance, but it rejects the KM's commitment to violence. Although the SDK's leadership is considered realistic and moderate, the organization has never jelled into a disciplined group.

7. The Malayang Pagkakaisa ng Kabataang Pilipino (MPKP - Union of Free Filipino Youth), which

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was organized in 1967 as the youth arm of the Philippine chapter of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, hoped to appeal to youth and student elements in both urban and rural areas. Apparently it has had little success, partly because of a rumor spread by rival leftist groups that it is a front of the Philippine security services.

8. These student organizations are of some substance and permanence. Scores of others have surfaced, often over a specific issue, and then disappear as emotions cool or as their leadership breaks into factions. A current example of one of these ad hoc organizations is the Movement for a Democratic Philippines (MDP), a grouping of leftist student and labor organizations that was formed after the initial student demonstrations in late January to coordinate efforts against Marcos. Weakened from the beginning by the reluctance of moderate student groups to participate, it has been further enfeebled by disagreements over the advisability of violent tactics. These quarrels illustrate the gulf between student moderates and radicals and also the fluid nature of the alliance of formerly rival leftist groups.

Frustrations Stemming from the Philippine Educational System

9. What the students see as their unpromising career prospects can be blamed only in part on the government's resistance to reform and the prevalence of nepotism in both government and private employment. Much of the difficulty stems from the Philippine sense of values. The Filipinos set great store on the prestige of a higher education, and the ratio of college and university students to the total population is exceeded only by that of the US. Social norms, however, have fostered a misdirected focus on "prestige" fields, with the result that there is a surfeit of graduates in certain disciplines. The Filipinos' ideas of prestigious employment is partly a reflection of the country's Spanish heritage. Education, commerce, and liberal arts account for some 75 percent of total enrollment, and a disproportionately large percentage of students is also enrolled

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in law and medicine. The less respected engineering, science, and technical fields attract fewer than 6 percent of college and university students.

10. As a result of the topheavy concentration in sought-after but overcrowded lines of work, fewer than one in five graduates, it is estimated, is able to find employment commensurate with his educational training. There are approximately six applicants for each elementary teaching job opening; yet vacancies in the more remunerative science and technical fields go unfilled. The necessity for most degree holders to take on menial work leads to a constantly increasing body of underemployed and disgruntled. An acute shortage of skilled laborers would ensure employment, albeit at wages less than the required training should command, but the ingrained low esteem for blue-collar work deters students from pursuing the less ambitious but more practical goal of vocational training.

11. A continuing exodus abroad to greener employment pastures is a mark of the despair of highly trained individuals over the poor prospects of suitable employment at home. An estimated half of the 20,000 annual emigrants to the US are young professionals and their families. Many are doctors, whom Philippine medical schools turn out in such substantial numbers that they cannot find enough paying patients among the thin layer of society that can afford medical care. The government and the press lament the brain drain, but dismay has not become strong enough to spur a redirection of educational priorities.

misplaced.

The Student Protests and Marcos' Reaction

12. The current upsurge in student agitation was spawned by revulsion over the excesses of the presidential election last November that resulted in Marcos' becoming the Philippines' first two-term president. Students, who had been brooding over inequities in the system, responded more sharply than the general populace as a national awareness

proprietary med. schools

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train solely for the US market

developed of the extreme lengths to which Marcos went to widen the margin of his landslide victory. Marcos became in the students' eyes the embodiment of the ills of the Philippines.

13. The students were spurred to act by a growing suspicion that Marcos intended to perpetuate himself in office by guiding a constitutional convention scheduled for next year to repeal a constitutional provision limiting presidents to two terms. Marcos' annual state-of-the-nation address to the Philippine Congress on 26 January provided the occasion for the first student protest. Stones and bottles were thrown at the President and Mrs. Marcos as they left the Congress building. Heavy-handed police suppression of the melee strengthened the students' determination to stage more protests, and radicals turned a demonstration outside the presidential palace on 30 January into a bloody battle with police and armed forces that resulted in five student deaths and injuries to over 100. Marcos was stung by the unparalleled degree to which the students' ire was directed against him personally, and he labeled the demonstration a part of a Communist plot against his government. This testy reaction solidified student opposition to him.

14. Realizing that he had to make an early show of meeting student demands, Marcos sacked the chief of the constabulary--whose involvement in election irregularities had established him as the specific target of the students--agreed to curb other unsavory political cronies, promised to investigate several specific cases of corruption raised by the students, and made several laudable cabinet changes. But Marcos has often practiced the technique of making concessions only in order to ease immediate political pressures. It is unlikely that he will willingly follow up the elevation of competent young technocrats and other remedial gestures with any meaningful moves toward social and economic reforms.

15. Although unwilling to advocate reforms that would take the steam out of student protests,

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Marcos has realized that efforts must be made to deflect student disaffection from himself and his administration.

16. During the time he has gained by his concessions, Marcos has turned to his habitual technique: attempting to divide the opposition. His efforts to pit student moderates against the radicals may backfire; the more malleable moderates could be so weakened in a struggle with the disciplined left-wing groups that the position of the radicals in the whole student movement would be strengthened.

17. Marcos has tried to buy off and redirect the students rather than acknowledge and deal with their grievances. His failure to come forth with real initiatives, however, stems only partly from his faltering leadership. It also is a result of his excessive reliance on the counsel of close advisers in the presidential palace who tend to see student agitation as the beginning of a Maoist insurrection. Marcos' fearful concern for his personal safety, reinforced by the influence of soothsayers who have predicted his assassination, have caused him virtually to barricade himself in the presidential palace. This self-imposed isolation has contributed to a picture of a beleaguered antagonist. He suffered irreparable damage to his reputation and will now be hard-put to regain his aura as a national hero.

18. As part of his efforts to regain control of the situation, Marcos has seized on the US as a time-tested target. The work of his aides in bribing and persuading students to concentrate on anti-US grievances certainly created the atmosphere that led to the rowdy disturbances outside the US Embassy on 18 February. Marcos may encounter growing resistance to his manipulations, however. There is an increasing awareness and resentment among moderate students of the President's desire to blacken their movement by inciting violence. Although an apparent majority of students still prefer to concentrate on peaceful protest, radicals and administration-hired hoodlums can be expected to fan violence.

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19. Anti-Americanism is a cause eagerly embraced by the KM and its leftist associates. Continuation of this thrust, however, might further fragment the student movement--moderates are still more interested in airing national issues than in baiting the Americans. It could also reduce the likelihood of a persistent student push against national ills. Both eventualities would play into Marcos' hands.

Little Support for the Students

20. Although the students' condemnation of the deepset ills of Philippine society met with an initially favorable public reaction, their agitation has not received significant support. The emergence of violence in the protest movement caused many sympathizers to back off, and has been generally censured by the press.

21. Most politicians have been cool to the students. As members of the oligarchy, or pawns for it, they realize that the major reforms asked for by the students would adversely affect their own interests. The few opposition party politicians who have expressed support for the students have done so only in order to increase Marcos' isolation. Despite self-serving statements of support from a few Liberal Party congressmen, the party caucus voted overwhelmingly to condemn the drift toward violence in student demonstrations. A congressional investigation into student unrest, undertaken immediately after the outbreak of student disorders in late January, has shown more the earmarks of a witchhunt than a concerned inquiry and reflects the disinclination of the establishment to address itself to the deficiencies in national life.

22. The Philippines lacks the strong and unified labor movement that has given muscle to student protests in other countries. Elements of the labor left wing joined Philippine students after the initial demonstrations, but student suspicion over the degree of their commitment--and the limited number

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of the labor supporters--kept their role minor. The small and diverse group that considers itself the intelligentsia probably finds student activities compatible with its own attraction to leftist and social causes, but its support has been subdued. The ideologically motivated wing of the Huk dissidents in central Luzon has not been involved in the current student agitation.

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There is, moreover, no large middle class clamoring for reform. Its members realize that the present system is stacked against them, but the prevalent mood is one of resignation to a system regarded as too entrenched to be successfully attacked.

23. Almost the only vocal support for the students has come from Jesuit priests, some of them quite prominent, who have broken with the standpat church hierarchy to assist in the activities of student moderates. Although it is unlikely that their guidance will counterbalance the agitation of the left, Marcos has been sufficiently incensed by their participation to order an investigation into religious personalities involved in the student movement. The Jesuits' activities reflect a growing social conscience among progressive church elements disturbed over the church's close identification with the oligarchy. The stirrings within the church already disturb the establishment, but the development of a reformist-minded church will have to await the passing of its present hierarchy.

Real Reforms Still Far Off for the Philippines

24. Although students have found themselves in the forefront of the long-smoldering sentiment for social change, they remain divided on the means to pursue their common goal. Differences were patched up in the heat of the initial confrontation with Marcos, but the student alliance proved tenuous. Students are prone to the divisiveness that afflicts other groups in the national scene--the

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political left, the labor movement, and even the two national political parties. Cracks have already developed over the issue of violence, with the result that moderate elements have shied away from demonstrations in which it was suspected the KM would provoke incidents with government security forces. A majority of students still appear disposed to reasonable and controlled protest, but their restraint can be negated by the work of radicals and administration-hired provocateurs. The proliferation of new groups since the start of concerted agitation in late January reflects the fluidity and lack of cohesion of the movement, characteristics that will strengthen Marcos' conviction that he can undercut the students without significantly altering his government's course.

25. Marcos has recently partially emerged from his self-imposed isolation to make an unconvincing show of determination to undertake reform. Although he vowed to bring a revolution from above that would eliminate the need for a rebellion from below, his failure to mention any specific programs probably prompted more than the usual skepticism with which the Philippine populace greets his remarks. His condescending tone toward the students, particularly in the remark that he did not need their advice in setting a course toward reform, will heighten student disenchantment with him.

26. In view of the fragmention of the student movement and its lack of support to date from other sectors of society, the political establishment probably believes it does not have to bestir itself toward instituting social and economic reform. It may be underestimating the students' determination, however. The students, emboldened by their initial successes in extracting concessions from Marcos, will keep a sharp watch on his follow-through and will be quick to come up with new demands. A growing awareness of and resentment over Marcos' efforts to split their ranks and discredit their movement may spur students to hold their divisive tendencies in

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check and to strive for more responsible protests that would attract public approval and support. In any case, Marcos will be under persistent pressure for the remainder of his second term, and he will probably from time to time take calculated steps toward correcting some of the more blatant injustices in the Philippine system. But he and his allies in the oligarchy will probably be successful in the near term in keeping any reform measures short of a restructuring of Philippine society.

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